

thanks, bastards!

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thanks, bastards!

by [wizardwiles](#)

Summary

Dream placed his elbow on his knee, leaning forward with the utmost antagonism as he said, “I bet it’s real easy for you, living on daddy’s money,”

“Daddy’s money?” George repeated lowly and slowly, his voice grave and his eyes intense, “I’ve worked for everything I own, you bastard,”

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Western au in which Dream is an outlaw on the run, George and Sapnap get roped into the pandemonium, and conflicts, both internal and external, arise.

Notes

Op posting twice in one month? The fuck?

I wasn’t really expecting to write for something with DNF themes, and it’s highly ironic that I am, considering I said I was anti-RPF in my last post. But here we are. To be clear - the only reason I am okay with shipping DNF is because Dream and George have said, in no uncertain terms, that they are okay with fanfiction!!

Cowboy slang that's used in the fic:

Chiselers = a cheat/cheater/swindler

Burning the breeze = refers to a horse running really fast

airing your lungs = cussing

Wobbling jaw = adjective that means a person talks a lot

(gentlemen) of the first water = rich, upper class

Quirley = cigarette

Crowbait = a horse of poor quality (usually due to age)

CW/TW (AND SPOILERS)

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gun violence, breaking a limb, violence against an animal (no death though), mentions of death, near-death experience, blood, alcohol, smoking cigarettes, in depth discussion of smoking, religious sentiments (christianity), anti religious sentiments (anti-christianity), internalized and external homophobia

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Dream fucked up bad this time.

He was about to steal a horse from the richest family in a small town not marked on any maps - the same family he just stole a necklace from - but he was too busy fumbling with knots to notice the approaching footsteps until they were at the stable entrance.

The entry and the crime were undoubtedly the easiest; the retreat was, without fail, the part that caused this most difficulty. It wasn't helping that, between the bandana covering his nose and the wide brim of his hat and the dim light, Dream could hardly see what he was doing. Not to mention, his gloves were a little too loose, too worn on his hands, further complicating the process.

It didn't ease his nerves that the mare he was attempting to snatch was staring at him with knowing eyes, eyes that said *If you mess up, I'll tell.*

Hushed, inaudible voices could be heard from the far end of the stable, the entrance, accompanied by the soft yellow light of a lantern. Allegedly, there were two sheriffs, a useless display of power for such a pitifully small populace, Dream thought, but he was about to meet them personally unless he undid this knot.

"... a crook? In this piss-poor town?" One of the voices emitted.

The second, voice with a heavy foreign accent replied, "Chiselers have infested this part of the country, y'know. They're like vermin, scurrying from town to town and taking from good, hard-working people 'cause they're too lazy to get a job themselves,"

Dream could barely bite his tongue at that. He wouldn't use the word "hard-working" to describe the gentry who lazed around in their estates with a silver spoon in their mouth.

He managed to get the knot loose as the two men continued making small talk. Now, he had the Sisyphean task of saddling a horse without making a ruckus ahead of him.

Dream had the saddle looped over his arm, but when he approached the horse, she took a step back, shifting the hay noisily underfoot. If she whined or bucked even once, Dream's ass would be, colloquially speaking, grass. He wouldn't have time to mount a stressed horse, and he had ridden bareback before, but it was far from his first choice...

"... why don't we just check the stables to be sure?" The accented man said.

Although, there wasn't room for choice now.

Dream devised a shotty plan, forcing his scattered thoughts to focus for a few seconds, for it was all the time he had. The pen he was in was located towards the back, but it wasn't the last one. If he waited until the two men were at the very back of the barn, he could make a run for it without them blocking his way.

Dream hid in the furthest corner of the pen, holding his breath and praying to any god that would bother to listen. He stuck out like a sore thumb, dressed in a bright green duster and bandana to match, but there was no time for him to fuss over that. Dream really didn't fancy the idea of dying in an unfamiliar town at the hands of two law enforcement officers, surrounded by horse shit.

The two mens' footsteps were nearly impossible to hear in the dirt, but their lantern and shadows queued Dream into where they were located. He sat there, perfectly still with baited breath, watching as the light gradually grew brighter, the shadows drawing nearer. When their shadows stilled, Dream kicked open the pen doors and jumped on the horse as quickly as he could manage.

The mare certainly wasn't pleased, but when Dream dug his spurs into her flank, she sprinted out at an impossibly high speed, nearly throwing him off in the jerky motion.

Without looking to aim, Dream pulled out his handgun and shot once behind him, his other hand fisted in the mare's mane. He didn't plan on committing a murder tonight, so he hoped a warning shot would be enough to delay them or put them off his trail entirely. Distantly, he heard a ricochet, followed by one of them yelling *shit*, so he could only assume it worked.

The horse bolted through the city, the deteriorated buildings melting into dark flashes embroidered in silver moonlight. Burning the breeze, he left the town behind him in dust.

The cool night air billowed through his duster, sending chills down his body. He took his hat off his head, letting it flap in his hand as the cold breeze soaked his golden hair. It wasn't often he got to enjoy nights like these, with nothing but the horse's thunderous thumping below him and the night sky above him.

After a few minutes of this, the mare slowed considerably until she moved at a pace that could only be considered a light trot. No matter how much Dream urged her to go faster, she only grew more defiant. He idly wondered if he should just abandon her and run until he found cover, but the land in front of him was so flat he could see the curve of the globe, and he doubted he had the endurance.

However, he wasn't anxious until he heard the distant thumping of hooves, and he became panicked when he could see the dust trails of the other two men, the sheriffs. He held his handgun with both hands and turned around, aiming as well as he could in the dark. He fired somewhat aimlessly into the dark because, at this point, he really didn't care if he killed one of them or not.

The gunfire scared the wits out of the mare, and she took off sprinting again. Dream nearly fell off at the unanticipated change of pace, but he scrambled and barely managed to hold on, clinging to her mane, praying he could reach settlement or campsite or *anything* before the officers caught up.

To Dream's misfortune, the two men were rapidly closing the distance until one was neck and neck with Dream, the other flanking him. He could barely make out what the one to his right was saying with the wind in his ears and his heart in this throat, but it was something along the lines of "By the law of *Santa Mariana*, you are under arrest,"

All he could think to respond with was: "Fuck off, bootlickers,"

The man to his right shot his pistol once, narrowly missing Dream's head. He was so caught up in the euphoria of dodging a bullet that he barely registered the man behind him was also armed and willing to kill. Distantly, he heard gunfire from behind him.

He was confused as to why his left side was growing warmer, his clothes damper until he attempted to turn to face the man on his right, forced to a stop by the metal grind of a bullet against his ribs, lodged in between two of the arching bones. Immediately, he put his gun in the holster, clasp his bleeding torso with one hand. It didn't feel real to Dream, the blood seeping between his fingers, the ache in his side, the rapid beating of his heart all felt distant from the pandemonium in his mind. He could hardly feel the wound now, high off adrenaline, but he was quickly coming to his senses, realizing that he might not see sunrise.

Faintly, he heard the man beside him yell, "If you yield, we won't shoot to kill,"

Dream merely shook his head at that, cursing under his breath. *They won't shoot to kill, but they'll shoot to what? Severely injure you, so you later die of infection?*

Needless to say, he had no plans to yield any time soon.

From his peripherals, Dream noticed the man on his right gesturing vaguely, but he didn't comprehend the relevance of the action until seconds later when he heard a gunshot, when his horse fell on her side and Dream's legs were pinned under her.

She thrashed and convulsed on the ground, her four legs jerking as she cried out in anguish, but Dream didn't have time to check for blood or wounds; he was concerned with not getting crushed alive. He clambered out from under her, nearly passing out from the combined pain of his bullet wound and broken leg. The other two men got off their horses in the meantime.

"You shot a horse?" Dream hollered, incredulous and dying, "You sick bastards,"

This was the first time Dream was able to get a proper look at the other men, drinking in all the details of their appearance he could in the brief moment of stasis. The two men were about the same height and had dark hair.

The one with the pistol had a masculine face dusted with facial hair, and he was adorned in white and black, with small ornamentations standing out in orange. The other had softer features, wore a pigmented blue, and carried an expensive-looking shotgun.

Both were dressed rather sharply, as though they had a pretty penny to spare. The two sheriffs wore vests and button ups under their dusters, which had immaculate lapels. Their spurs, gold Sheriff badges, and bolo ties glimmered brightly in the dark.

Neither of them answered Dream, but instead shared a hard look. The man with the pistol went to tend to the horse while the man with the shotgun pointed it at Dream, the end of the barrel inches from his face. Dream grimaced at the familiar *click* of loading.

He produced a flask from his breast pocket with a knowing sigh, unscrewing it with his teeth. He took a swig, savoring the burn in his mouth. With the cap of the flask in his mouth, he jibed,

“What? Not gonna finish the job? You’re not goin’ soft on me, are you, *Sheriff*?”

Dream poured the rest of the alcohol on his wound, doing his best not to flinch. The man with the shotgun scoffed, “Going soft would be letting you go free. This,” - he punctuated the word by lowering his gun - “is saving a bullet,”

“We’re not letting him go? You’re - we’re *arresting* him?” The other man broke in, “George, I thought we were going to, y’know,” he gestured vaguely, gun in hand.

“Uh, If I may,” Dream gestured to the blood pooled under him, stark against his green vestments, “I don’t think arresting me is going to do much good,”

The two sheriffs looked at the sight and visibly recoiled, a shadow of regret flashing across their faces. They shared a look for a long moment.

“Let’s get what we need and go,” George muttered to the other man before turning to Dream. He kneeled on the ground, hand outstretched, “I think you know what that is,”

A string of profanities rolled off Dream’s tongue as he dug around his satchel, still laying on his side. He retrieved a pure gold necklace bejeweled with the largest gemstone he’d ever laid eyes on. The carvings of the gold were now crusted with Dream’s blood, and the entire chain was slick with red. George snatched it out of Dream’s hands before holding it up to the moonlight.

“What even is this?” George pondered, making a point to ignore the fact another man’s blood now coated his hands, “Citrine? Amber?”

“It’s emerald, you blind bat,” Dream growled. He was beginning to feel faint, and the sky was spinning. He only managed to keep his head up out of spite.

“What now?” The man in white asked his partner

George gestured to their horses, as if to say *let’s just leave him, the poor piece of shit*. Dream’s stolen horse was standing, but only on three legs, the third was held off the ground, wrapped in cloth. Evidently, she was shot in the ankle - she would survive, but she probably couldn’t run again.

George had one foot in the stirrup of his saddle, and his partner was walking over to his own horse.

Dream’s mind buzzed in a frenzy. He was hardly able to swallow the mental image of his death: bleeding out in the middle of the desert, shivering and hungry with his organs askew in the dirt until he passed out, left to rot in the sun’s glare hours later. He couldn’t stomach the notion.

“Wait,” He called out tenuously, surprised when the two men turned to him, “Will you... will you start a fire?”

“So you can signal for help?” George questioned without batting an eye, his eyes narrowed.

“You won’t even set a fire for a dying man?” The man in green borderline begged, his voice oozing with desperation, “You’re going to go home to your wife, and sleep easy tonight, knowing perfectly well you shot a man and left him to die in the middle of nowhere?”

The sheriffs seemed to ponder Dream’s words, turning them over in their minds, considering.

Weakly, Dream pleaded, “Be a good samaritan?”

The man in white nodded to the other man, a gesture so small Dream almost missed it. A wave of unprecedented euphoria washed over him as George wordlessly gathered stones, arranging them into a circle and placing dry tinder in the centre. His partner produced his own flask, pouring a bit of alcohol over the meager collection of dried twigs before striking a match. A small fire bloomed in the centre of the rocks, illuminating the three men. A wave of heat flooded over Dream, and, *god*, he didn't realize how cold he was.

"Thanks," He mumbled absently, "I 'spose you can be on your way now,"

With sedated motions, Dream wriggled out of his duster, balling up the blood-stained garment and folding it under his head. He laid there, with a hand on his side as blood splattered between his fingers, his formerly white shirt clinging to his skin. His eyes were glued to the stars sparkling overhead, staring blankly as they began blurring together, white streaking across the black sky.

The accented one, George, spoke, but his words sounded muffled, "This is ridiculous. He's just laying there, like a kicked puppy. It's pathetic,"

"What can I say?" Dream retorted humorlessly, hardly aware he was speaking, "I'm just a dog with no bite,"

He heard shuffling, and after a few seconds, one of the men was kneeling at his side. He made quick work of Dream's button up, leaving Dream's upper body bare, exposing the bloody, the mangled flesh on his side. Dream didn't bother fighting back until one of the hands dug inside his bullet wound in his back, two fingers prodding under his skin, plunging into his flesh.

"The *fuck* are you doing?" He rasped through grit teeth, through excruciating pain. He vaguely tried to shove the other man away, but his flailing was sloppy and uncoordinated.

"Helping," The accented man replied, removing his hand from Dream's body. He opened Dream's palm and placed something small, heavy, and bloody inside it. Dream thumbed it over, not quite registering what it was or where it came from.

"You're lucky that didn't hit your spine," George said, but Dream didn't process what he meant.

Minutes later, Dream's wounds were dressed in more alcohol and cloth wrappings. Sure, breathing and moving was agonizing, but he could survive. With the shuffling of feet to the other side of the fire, the two men began to mount their horses again, preparing to leave Dream in the desert with nothing. Maybe he should've counted his blessings, but Dream decided to push his luck.

"Leavin' so soon?" Dream asked, perching himself up on one elbow.

George whirled around, mouth open and eyebrows pointed, but his partner interrupted, "He's got a point,"

"Sapnap!" George hissed.

The man, Sapnap, raised his hands defensively, "Weren't you the one who wanted to arrest him?"

George pulled Sapnap aside, and they immediately began bickering in whisper-shouts. Dream couldn't make out more than individual words at a time, especially with them talking over each other. After a minute or so, they turned to face him.

"By the law of *Santa Mariana*, you are under arrest," George informed him, his tone overly supercilious and dripping with self-importance, "We will remain here - with you - for an indeterminate amount of time, until we feel you are physically well enough to stand trial,"

Dream smiled toothily behind his bandana.

With difficulty, he shifted to sit cross-legged on the opposite side of the fire from the other two men. Sapnap let his eyes wander, glancing from the fire to the stars to the horizon, seemingly jumpy and unconcentrated, but George's gaze at Dream was unwavering. Aside from the soft crackle of the fire, there was no sound, no utterance between the three of them.

After a long while, Sapnap, the man in white, cleared his throat, "Uh, perhaps introductions are in order?"

Dream quirked an eyebrow, "Sure,"

"My name is Sapnap,"

Without missing a beat, Dream replied, "That's a funny name,"

"Well," Sapnap rebutted, his voice edgy, "I named myself,"

"I did the same. The name's Dream,"

George, who had been unspeakingly watching the encounter, interjected "And what's your *real* name?"

"You'd like to know?" Dream japed, "I killed everyone who ever heard it,"

George rolled his eyes at that, picking up on the sarcasm evident in his tone. Sapnap, on the other hand, looked genuinely disconcerted, and kept an eye on Dream's gun.

They relapsed once more into tense silence. George's dead stare didn't cease, and Dream pretended not to find it off-putting.

"So, uh," Sapnap piped up after a few long minutes, "What brought you to our small town?"

"Nothing, really," Dream replied honestly, "I didn't have a plan, but when I saw the one mansion, I knew I'd figure something out. I just thought it'd be easy to make some quick money,"

"You thought wrong," George borderline scolded, his tone bitter, "Can't believe you'd come to our small agricultural town just to steal from the hardworking folks,"

Dream frowned at that, "I'd hardly call the family I stole from 'hardworking.' Their estate is, what, double or triple the size of every other house? It's pretty clear they have the money to buy an emerald necklace for every individual in your town,"

George opened his mouth to reply, but closed it again. It was undeniable - the one rich family in town was hoarding the wealth and profiting off the labor of the other townsfolk. There wasn't a damn thing anyone could do about it.

"Why'd you steal the necklace, anyway?" Sapnap asked after a beat of silence.

"Didn't want to lose a bet,"

"To whom?"

"I hardly see how that's your business," Dream said sharply, eyes narrowing, "But, uh, I think the people 'round these parts called him the pig-headed prince, or something like that,"

That caused the two sheriffs to perk up, glancing quickly to each other before Sapnap remarked in bewilderment, “He’s infamous,”

“And so am I, outside of your small town in the middle of no man’s land,” Dream snipped, sounding slightly offended, “Ever heard of *The Hunter* or *The Man in Green* ?”

Sapnap gaped at that, and even George struggled to maintain his stoic countenance, eyes widening at the revelation.

“Doesn’t look very green to me,” George muttered defensively.

“That’s you?” Sapnap ignored the other’s comment, a mix of disbelief and wonder flashing in his eyes.

“In the flesh,” Dream gestured to himself, his smile wide and eyes bright. It wasn’t often he got to meet those who feared him.

George scowled, clearly not as impressed as his partner, “Aren’t you proud to be the best of the worst?”

“Is that all you have to say, Georgie?” Dream taunted, revelling as the other man’s face contorted upon hearing the nickname.

“Don’t call me that,”

“Shit,” Sapnap interjected, clearly eager to change the subject of conversation, “The fire’s running low.”

“I have a little bit of tinder left,” Dream simpered, gazing directly at George as he removed a pocket-sized Bible from his satchel and cast it into the flames. The fire roared to life, sending sparks onto the ground as the Bible’s thin paper pages smoldered.

“You disgust me,” George snarled belligerently.

Dream shrugged nonchalantly, “It’s not a big deal. I never used it anyway,”

George rolled his eyes as he mumbled, “And button your shirt,” with every word exuding his distaste.

Dream cocked his head to one side, “I don’t see why I should,”

“It’s good manners,” George replied stiffly.

“You *society* people, so obsessed with your manners,” The man in green spat out the word as though it was bitter, “It’s a social construct, you know that, right?”

“Forgive me,” George gestured emphatically with his hands as he spoke, “I wasn’t raised in a household where it’s acceptable to steal, disrespect authority, and have no modesty,”

“Then you’re clearly not from around here. Tell me, *Sheriff* George,” - Dream emphasized the other man’s title, mocking him “Where’s the accent from?”

“None of your goddamn business,”

Dream and George stared at each other for a long moment as the flames danced between them, the air growing tense with virulence and malevolence. Sapnap watched the exchange, the silent battle,

not daring to intervene.

“Funny hearin’ you say that. You’ll act all high n’ mighty for the lame man, but when you’re on your lonesome, you use your lord’s name in vain?” Dream snickered, “Fuckin’ disgraceful,”

“Oh, as if you’re one to condescend to me. As if you don’t go airing your lungs every five minutes with your wobbling jaw,” George said with repugnance before adding, “And you’re a thief and probably a bastard, too, from the looks of you,”

“Unlike you, I don’t pretend to be better than the vulgar. People like you piss me off, you *gentlemen* of the first water. You go ‘round, looking down your nose at the average townsfolk. Squinting your eyes at the people that work on Sundays ‘cause they’re so dirt poor, glarin’ the people that can’t afford fancy clothes,” Dream placed his elbow on his knee, leaning forward with the utmost antagonism as he said, “I bet it’s real easy for you, living on daddy’s money,”

“Daddy’s money?” George repeated lowly and slowly, his voice grave and his eyes intense, “I’ve worked for everything I own, you motherfucker,”

Dream opened his mouth only to close it again, shaking his head and laughing softly to himself.

“If you have something to say, then say it,” George intoned.

Dream clicked his tongue, “No need for presumption,”

The altercation ended there, with George and Dream irascible as ever and Sapnap uncomfortably caught between the two.

Unprompted, Dream began riffling around in his satchel, producing a small piece of paper and a dirt-like substance. He carefully sifted the substance onto the paper, doing so with the utmost care and intent.

“What are you doing?” George.

Dream didn’t look up from his task, “Rolling tobacco,”

Sapnap chimed in, “Most folks don’t do that ‘round these parts,”

“I’m not like most folks,” Dream said coolly.

The two men watched intently as Dream held the rolled paper over the top of the fire until the edges of the flames licked it, setting a spark. Dream brought it to his mouth, under his bandana, and inhaled deeply, savoring the prickling in his lungs and the back of his throat. As he exhaled, plumes of smoke curled around his covered face, drifting into the cold night sky.

He held out the cigarette out, gesturing to both men, “Wanna try?”

Sapnap shook his head and took a swig from his own flask. George, however, stood at the offer, and placed himself next to Dream with devilry in his eyes and spite in his smirk. They were mere inches apart - George attempting to assert dominance, and the other man accepting the challenge.

Without taking his eyes off Dream, George held out his hand. Dream wordlessly passed the cigarette, his leer unwavering. George brought the cigarette to his lips, barely inhaling before sputtering, breaking out into a series of coughs.

“How the hell was I supposed to enjoy that?” He caviled, his voice hoarse.

Dream couldn't keep the amusement out of his voice as he said, "You're not doing it the right way, of course,"

"I didn't realize there was a 'right way,'" George said with air quotes, "Maybe you should've told me, yeah?"

"Okay," Dream replied as he shifted closer to George, their shoulders brushing, "I will,"

He plucked the cigarette from George's hand, "Don't hold it with the tips of your thumb and forefinger. I find it's easier to put it between your fingers, uh, like this," - Dream placed his right palm on the back of George's right hand, angling the cigarette between his middle and forefinger - "And then inhale-"

"Obviously," George interposed.

Dream brushed him off and continued, "Inhale, but don't just fill your mouth with the smoke, try to fill your lungs instead. And when it burns, don't stop or cough, just let it happen,"

Dream removed his hand from George's, leering at him as he took another inhale. His inhale was steady aside from a short stutter, but he continued as Dream advised. When he exhaled, he sat still for a moment, the ecstasy of nicotine washing over him, before glancing at the other man sheepishly with a small smile adorning his face.

"Not bad," George murmured as he brought the cigarette to his lips again, taking another drag.

Dream nodded softly in response before reaching for his satchel. He didn't bother moving away from the other man.

"What are you doing?" George inquired, genuinely curious instead of bitter.

"Rolling another cigarette,"

George held out his hand, the cigarette hanging loosely between his slender fingers, "Why don't you just take this one?"

"It's yours now," Dream replied breezily, then turned to George with a devilish glint in his eyes, "Besides, I don't know where your mouth has been,"

Sapnap sniggered across the fire, entertained by the exchange. George suddenly felt a bit awkward. He had forgotten he had company, aside from Dream. George was so busy fumbling through his thoughts - that Dream spoke to him like *that* and that his partner witnessed it - that George barely registered that Dream's face was inches from his own, holding his cigarette to the butt of the one hanging loosely from George's lips.

"The hell do you think you're doing?" George blurted, leaning away from the other. He couldn't tell if he was offended by the gesture itself or the fact that a part of him liked it.

Dream blinked once, twice, and then said "lighting my cigarette," like it was obvious.

"The fire's right there,"

"But you're right here,"

This time, George didn't back away as Dream leaned in, touching the ends of their cigarettes together. He vaguely noted that there was no real reason for Dream to lean in so close, especially

since he was using his hands, but George didn't comment. His mouth felt dry.

"You should've read Leviticus before you burnt that bible," He muttered under his breath, causing the other sheriff to break into laughter. Dream looked at him quizzically, but didn't respond.

"Look at you two, gettin' close and sharin' a quirley," Sapnap snorted, revelling in the glare he received from his partner.

Dream turned to the other man, playing off Sapnap's bit and said, "Yeah, George, how would your wife feel, knowing her husband was smoking with an outlaw?"

George opened his mouth before closing it again, flustered. After a moment of collecting himself, he indignantly grumbled, "I don't have a wife, y'know,"

George expected to hear a quip or a jibe any second, he was already mulling over the points of ridicule in his head. A twenty-three year old man with his affluence and his career should surely be in want of a wife and several children by now. Yet, amazingly, he had nothing to show for it. He didn't know why, but for some inexplicable reason, he was ashamed of it, maybe more than was reasonable.

Dream looked at him blankly, his tone incomprehensible as he said, "That so?"

The two men locked eyes for a long minute. Dream took a wordless drag from his cigarette, the tendrils of smoke crawling out from under the bandana, drifting in front of his eyes.

Sapnap cleared his throat and cut in, "You two are bein' pretty amicable, considering he shot your ass a few hours ago,"

"For the record," George averted his gaze from the other two, "I didn't want to hit you,"

"I didn't want to hit either of you," Dream chuckled, "The difference is I actually didn't. 'Spose now we know which one of us is better at firing warning shots,"

"Sounds like a fancy way of saying you've got terrible aim," Sapnap chaffed, causing the other two men to break into laughter.

They settled into silence again, but it wasn't uncomfortable. It was a pleasant pause in conversation, a comforting lull to the fast pace of their normal lives.

"The sky's beautiful tonight," Dream remarked, talking more to himself than either of the other men.

"It's just a bunch of stars," George scoffed, but the bitterness was gone from his voice.

" 'Just a bunch of stars?' " Dream shook his head disapprovingly, "I could teach you a thing or two about 'just a bunch of stars',"

Sapnap rolled his eyes, "I'm with George on this one. I don't think there's anything special about some balls of light in the sky,"

Dream looked at the both of them, his eyes clouded with bewilderment. The two men couldn't see his mouth, but they assumed it would be wide open in shock.

"For being such high society men, you really don't know shit," Dream motioned for Sapnap to join him and George on the other side of the fire. He obliged, and the three sat shoulder-to-shoulder as

Dream pointed to the sky.

“You see that group of stars that looks like a five sided box with the extra two stars to the side? That one’s called *the phoenix* ,”

“Phoenix?” George repeated, the word foreign on his tongue.

“Yeah,” The man in green affirmed, extrapolating to the best of his ability, “It’s, uh, like a bird. But when it dies, it bursts into flames-”

“That sounds terrible,” Sapnap added, sounding uneasy.

“-But then it’s reborn from the ashes, and the cycle continues,” Dream finished

“For you are dust and to dust you shall return,” George mused to himself, “I never knew what a Phoenix was,”

“Me neither,” His partner admitted.

Dream looked at the both of them, confusion lacing his tone as he said, “Surely you know what a pegasus is?”

Sapnap said, “Never heard of ‘em”

“How do *you* of all people know all this?” George condescended.

“I read. I listen. I’ve gone to a lot of places,” Dream replied vaguely, “Well, do you see the group of stars that looks like a square, the one with the four offshoots?”

Dream continued to explain the constellations, going in depth about each one, telling stories about his life or mythology or a variety of topics. Eventually, George and Sap joined him until they were all laughing and shooting the shit, smoking and drinking and leaning on each other.

Dream was hit with a startling, persistent feeling - an ache in his chest, nostalgia for something he never had, for a time period that never existed. He thought it funny he was sharing a drink and a laugh with the two men trying to kill him early, but sometimes the universe works in funny ways like that. Maybe they could’ve been close friends in another life, where Dream wasn’t a criminal on the run, where George and Sapnap didn’t have big shoes to fill. It could’ve been them against the world, and all three of them knew it.

“You’re really not that scary,” George commented out of nowhere. The three of them had been watching the sunset silently, only the final crackles of the fire filling the air, “Not after I got to know you,”

Dream smiled toothily under his bandana and said, “I could say the same for you two,”

Just as Sapnap opened his mouth, ready to make a witty reply, distant hollering accompanied by gunfire could be heard.

“Who the hell is causing a ruckus this early in the morning?” Sapnap observed, irked.

Dream stood up with a start, wincing and shifting the weight off his broken leg. He slipped his bloodstained duster over his shoulders as he responded, clipped and curt: “Bandits,”

“Bandits?” George repeated, voice stricken with confusion.

“Looters, mercenaries, whatever you want to call ‘em,” Dream extended a hand to George, helping him off the ground. His hand lingered for a moment, “I’m sure you’ve encountered a few. Point is, they’ve probably been travelling all night, and now I reckon they’re headed for your town,”

Sapnap rushed to his own horse, placing a foot in the stirrup, “George, we have to hurry,”

George glanced between his partner and Dream before his eyes settled on the latter, “What do we do?”

“We?”

With one swift motion, Dream raised a shotgun - the shotgun George discarded, the shotgun that was long forgotten - and aimed it.

Sapnap instinctually reached for his pistol, before a look of morbid realization crossed his face. His holster was empty, the pistol laid on the dirt next to the fire. Dream noticed the aim of his gaze and strode over to the pistol, snatching it and tucking it away.

“You won’t be needing this, will you?” Dream chirped as he mounted George’s horse, a stallion with powerful legs, “You two are on your own,” - Dream gestured to the mare with the shot foot and winked at George - “The crowbait’s yours, darling,”

“Dream!” George cried, his tone strained with disbelief and pain. A thousand words crashed inside his skull,

Dream aimed Sapnap’s pistol into the air and fired once, the bang resounding loudly.

“The hell are you doing?” Sapnap demanded, his voice growing pitchy with fear, “They’re going to hear you,”

Dream’s eyes widened with sick amusement as he fired another shot, “That’s kind of the point,”

George and Sapnap went through the five stages of grief in a matter of seconds, the bitter realization hitting both of them at once.

Dream guided his horse away from the dumbfounded men before pausing, turning back to say, “Good luck out here, you’re better men than me, It was a pleasure meeting ya, Sheriff Sap-” He looked to the other man and nodded to him - “Georgie,”

Ire bubbled in George’s chest, burning under his skin. He hated that he allowed himself to get whisked away his own perverse fantasy, he hated that he let his guard down, silently vowing to never do so again.

For a split second, he locked eyes with Dream, and with immeasurable hurt in his voice, he said, “Thanks for the cigarette,”

Dream’s eyes darkened momentarily, clouded by something unrecognizable. He turned away.

“Thanks, bastards!”

With those last words, he fled, riding East, disappearing into the myriad of colors splayed against the sky. George and Sapnap stood there in silence, too flabbergasted to speak.

They were unarmed and stranded with two horses, one of which couldn’t move faster than a trot, as a group of alleged bandits closed in on the unprotected town.

“Son of a bitch,” Sapnap said inanely, more of a comment than a curse.

George sighed, too tired to respond. All the lightness from the banter, the hours of storytelling left his body. His body felt as heavy as lead as he settled on the back of Sapnap’s horse. They began making the walk back to town, guiding the shot mare. It was all they could do.

“Well,” Sapnap began, sounding as defeated as George felt, “At least he didn’t get-”

“The necklace!” George interrupted, slapping a hand to his forehead, “The necklace was in my satchel, and the satchel”

“Was on your horse?” Sapnap finished, chuckling mirthlessly at the absurdity of it all, “Fuckin’ classic,”

After an hour of trotting at an abominably slow pace, the town was evidently still in order. The sun had barely made it over the horizon, and most folks were probably still asleep. On Sundays, most of them slept in, only waking up to make it to the ten o’clock church services. It was common knowledge the drunkards and whores who had been out all night went to the early morning sermons.

Still, there was no evidence of criminal activity or chaos of any sort. As George slipped off Sapnap’s horse, watching as he guided it to the stable. He idly wondered if Dream was lying about the bandits so he could leave them while they were panicked and irrational, so he could get the upper hand.

That son of a bitch.

As if reading his partner’s mind, Sapnap said, “Dream was a wild fella, wasn’t he?”

The two began the walk to their respective homes at the edge of town. The streets were dead, aside from the occasional breeze kicking leaves or the scurrying of rats.

“Good riddance, if you ask me. I’m glad he’s gone,” George kicked a pebble petulantly, “I’ll take the morning watch, you should get some rest,”

“Thanks,” Sapnap paused, turning on his heel to face his partner, “And, uh, do you genuinely mean that? What you said about Dream?”

“Well, of course,” George said as though it was obvious, “He’s a lawless, godless man. Besides, I don’t want this town to turn into Sodom and Gomorrah,” - When Sapnap raised a questioning eyebrow, George added - “I saw the way he was looking at me,”

“If only you could’ve seen how you were lookin’ at him,” Sapnap murmured under his breath.

George prayed his face wasn’t red as he shot a vicious glare at his partner, “The hell is that supposed to mean?”

“George, I know this is an unpopular notion, ‘specially ‘round these parts, but, uh,” Sapnap glanced around and lowered his voice, “If you - if you were to, uh - if you preferred-”

“*Don’t* project your absurd ideas onto me and tarnish my good name,” George sibilated, his voice barely above that of a whisper, his eyes blazing with irascibility, “We are not having this goddamn conversation. Not here, not now, not in a million years, and certainly not about *him*,”

George didn’t realize how short of breath he was until he stopped talking, his chest rising and

falling quickly. His whole body was on edge, his fight or flight instincts activated as though he was staring down the barrel of a gun.

Sapnap sighed and looked at the other man sympathetically, “George, you know I didn’t mean it like that,”

“Go home, Sapnap,” George tried to command, but it sounded more like a bitter plea, “I’ll see you at noon. Don’t bring any of this up again. Ever,”

Dream’s heart pounded hard, jumping into his throat and pressing against his gag reflex. He gripped the reins too tightly until his knuckles turned white as he ignored the nagging feeling inside him. He half-expected one of the sheriffs to have another pistol, to put a full metal jacket in his head right then and there. It would’ve been easier if they tried to kill him, but all they did was stare with puppy eyes as Dream deserted them. It hurt more that way.

A dog with no bite, huh?

I have to laugh.

With eyes glued on the plains in front of him, he planned his route of travel for the next few weeks. He needed to pawn the necklace for thrice its worth to any idiot hick who has an eye for pretty jewels. Then, he was going to sleep easy that night, with money in his pocket and a warm meal in his stomach, knowing he would see George and Sapnap again.

Soon.

End Notes

I love cowboys and cowboy history very deeply, so I decided to write this! A very special thank you to @coralfans on tumblr for hyping me up during the writing process and drawing amazing cowboy au art <3 best mc gf i could ask for :)

I have an idea for a very dnf-centric part 2 and dream team friendship-centric part 3, but I don’t think I’ll write them unless this fic gets a lil bit of hype tbh. That being said, I haven’t written for a ship as popular as dnf yet, so idk how well this fic will do! If you want a part 2, please consider leaving a kudos and maybe even a comment :) <3

That being said I lowkey do hate my writing so!!!

Title is from Thanks, Bastards by Mischief Brew! I was also inspired by Fences by Destroy Boys with some of the dialogue. kinda funny how both of these songs are on my dream team cowboy playlist (https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4l11PagiyszIa36HLwzQRk?si=_gQ4UCvNSpipYDms1Lwdyg)

Ty for reading until the end! If you have any questions or you want to see some more

unhinged bullshit of mine, follow my tumblr @wormweeb !!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!